

PEEFACE

THE book, which is here presented to the public, was originally composed as a dissertation sent in to compete for a fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge. Its object is to give a general picture of English society, politics, and religion at a certain stage in their progress, and to recount the leading and characteristic events of a brief period in our country's history. That period, which represents, as far as England is concerned, the meeting point of the mediaeval and the modern, is of peculiar interest and importance. As the book is now addressed to the general reader, and not to students alone, I have felt obliged to omit here and there the discussion of historical problems which, though of interest to students, throw little or no light on the period as a whole. For a similar reason I have given my quotations from * Piers Plow* man' and Wycliffe in modern English ; though I have not ventured to take the same liberty with Chaucer, whose very spelling is sacred to literature. The Note? and Appendices are not intended to contain information of importance to the general reader, but are adduced as proofs of statements in the text, and are intended for the historical critic. For, notwithstanding its wider and more popular aim, I venture to hope that the book may claim to be a serious contribution to history. It is based on original authorities, and many of these authorities have been now for the first time unearthed in the Public Record Office and British Museum. (

While this volume was in course of
preparation for the